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GRAND RAPIDS

4 corrections officers accused of assault on inmate who attacked officer

Updated: Mar. 26, 2025, 8:48 p.m. | Published: Mar. 26, 2025, 8:41 p.m.

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By John Agar | jagar@mlive.com

IONIA COUNTY, MI – Corrections officer Jordan Csernyik was monitoring the food line at Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility when an inmate threw trays at his face and began punching.

Csernyik, 23, swung the inmate, John Callaghan, 27, to the ground and landed on him. Other officers responded and began hitting and kneeing Callaghan in what they said were attempts to gain control of a resisting inmate.

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Csernyik delivered three drive stuns from a Taser.

It all happened in less than a minute.

Now, Csernyik and three other corrections officers are facing criminal charges. The inmate suffered serious injuries: broken vertebrae in his

lower back and broken bones in his face and hand.

Ionia County Prosecutor Kyle Butler knows what goes on in prisons. He reviews a lot of cases of inmates harming staff or others.

“We see corrections officers acting very appropriately in those situations,” he told MLive/The Grand Rapids Press. “This is not one of those situations. It’s a very different situation.”

But attorneys said that the corrections officers followed Michigan Department of Correction (MDOC) policies in subduing a violent inmate’s unexpected, premeditated attack. They predicted that jurors would find them not guilty if the cases go to trial.

Csernyik’s attorney, Jeffrey Foldie, said his client could only react – and did not know if Callaghan, holding his hands tightly under his chest, had a “shiv,” or makeshift weapon, as they struggled on the ground.

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“They were certainly, at the end of the day, within (MDOC) policy,” he said.

He thinks Callaghan suffered most of his injuries in the initial take down when both inmate and officer hit the concrete floor.

Csernyik, Ray Thomas Rubley, 33, Andrew Ray Carr, 39, and Al-Ani Mustafa, 44, are charged with misconduct in office, a five-year felony, and aggravated assault, a one-year misdemeanor.

The officers, who were charged in late February, are free on personal-recognizance bonds. They await April 23 preliminary examinations in Ionia County District Court to determine if they should stand trial in Circuit Court.

The situation is devastating for the defendants, who are now on unpaid leave.

Foldie, who represents Csernyik and Carr, said his clients responded to a chaotic, “rapidly deteriorating situation” at the prison just outside of Ionia and relied on their training and experience.

The incident happened July 7 in a Level IV wing at the prison, just below maximum security, housing those convicted of serious crimes or considered management problems, Foldie said.

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He said that Callaghan and other inmates were fed in their housing units, rather than chow hall, because of ongoing “disruptions” in that area.

Csernyik had his back against a large metal container when he was attacked, a state police report said.

He had nowhere to retreat, his attorney said.

It was an “appropriate response to a deadly force attack on my client, Mr. Csernyik. … (Callaghan) got a food tray and took a step, a foot or so from Csernyik, and started throwing punches.”

Eric Matwiejczyk, who represents Mustafa, said his client did nothing wrong.

“I believe my client is totally innocent of all charges and will be vindicated at a subsequent trial. He’s not going to accept anything, a plea bargain. He did his job in controlling the prisoner.”

Mustafa has an “impeccable record,” he said.

Andrew Lapres, who represents Rubley, said he and other attorneys have reviewed the evidence. It includes video, statements from charged and uncharged staff and inmates.

All concluded charges were unwarranted, he said.

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He acknowledged Callaghan suffered serious injuries but said “that doesn’t mean anybody did anything wrong.”

Both prosecution and defense said that Callaghan attacked the officer so that he would be moved after his cellmate said he planned to sexually assault him that day. Callaghan did not want to seek protective custody because of how it would be viewed by other prisoners.

Callaghan is small, 5-foot-6, weighing 143 pounds, the MDOC website showed.

He was serving six years, three months in

prison for a 2020 conviction for second-degree arson in Grand Traverse County. He was convicted in 2024 of possessing a weapon in prison and felonious assault.

He was sentenced in December to one year, six months in prison for the assault on prison staff.

Butler, the prosecutor, said MDOC conducted an internal review and asked state police to investigate Callaghan's actions, as well as the response by corrections officers, for potential criminal charges.

State police asked prosecutors to file charges.

Butler talked to experts, including MDOC staff, about use of force before deciding to charge the officers. He noted the seriousness of the inmate's injuries.

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State police said in a report that Callaghan appeared to be struck multiple times while he was face down and motionless.

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